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TRASH THEORY: THE “YOUNG-GIRL” DEPLOYMENT

BIOPOLITICS CULTURE INDUSTRY, POP, TIQQUN, YOUNG GIRL

I just found this weird little book. It's been referenced here and there in the literature on biopolitics. Published in the *Tiqqun*, a French-Italian Anarchist journal, who only managed to produce two issues (the 1999 and 2001). “*Raw Materials for the Theory of the Young-Girl*” is the alternative title. A very strange title for an anarchist peace. Let's jump in.

Off to an unexpected start, the opening paragraph seems to be a kind of forewarning; “*a war is being waged*” it says. A war that is characterized as *hidden*, lucrative — a kind of internal war the purpose of which is to control, constrain or otherwise govern individuals. Some sort of apparatus of internal surveillance. Typical, so far.

A particular form of totalitarian control that aims to secure “*forms of life*” or lifestyles. It utilizes various seemingly apolitical institutions to get a hold on the *body*. Psychiatry, medicine, biology etc. “*It’s about profiling the citizens*”. This particular technology of power is entirely modern, it is less geared towards repression, more so towards production, an instance of *soft power*, a matter of management and inclusion, rather than direct oppression and expulsion. Under the circumstances, identifying the enemy; that there is a war going-on at all would entail half the victory. As the frontlines are hidden within the everyday, the very realization that there *is* war, could already be a battle — won.

The “Young-Girl ” it says, refers to a certain production, an engineering of a particular type of human, constituted through the commodification of lifestyles. In order for Capitalism to function, it is no longer sufficient to *have* a labor-force; today, employers are increasingly invested in the subjective, phenomenological or first-person perspective of the worker. In other words, it is no longer enough to sacrifice one’s time and energy in the production of value, one must be a particular *kind of person* in order to be employable.

From what I gather so far, the Young-Girl is a variant of the *Homo-Oeconomicus*, a popular term within the biopolitical field. You can read about it in my previous post: **Biometric Technology and The Theory of Human Capital**. Effectively it’s an archetype, a consumer-persona who’s entire life is essentially commodified. Think of Instagram models (men or women of any and all sexual orientation or gender) and social media sponsorship in general. The distinction between work and leisure is no longer prevalent. The products advertised on social media are incorporated into the fabric of the concrete lifestyle, be it health and wellness, sports and athletics or fashion etc. This is what the author(s) refer to as “*commodity society*”. We are a commodity society.

“*The Young-Girl is good for nothing but consuming; leisure or work, it makes no difference*” (Reins 2001, 2)

If the Young-Girl is a gender-free term, as the article claims it is, then why this particular choice of words? First, because adolescents present the main targets for consumer-culture. This is where bio-power becomes most intensified, because young adults have a relationship of “pure consumption” with the commodity society. Second, young women in particular seem to be endangered through economic governance. But why? And third, the point is, as I see it, that we are all in some sense *made into* or *subjectified* into a “Young-Girl” of sorts. I have a few thoughts and suggestions about this, but there is, so far, no clear elaboration of these power-relations. Alongside the Foucaultian *Homo Oeconomicus*. I am also thinking of Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* as another variety of the Young-Girl. I’ll leave it up to the reader to ponder the question. But I feel we will return to this topic.

There is an interesting parallel floating beneath the text, implied as it is, without being spelled out completely. The Young-Girl seems to be an anthropomorphic manifestation of Capital. She’s like fiat money, almost literally. “She” possesses no real identity, no tradition; nothing fixed nor tangible about her personality — but she’s hot. She’s sexy and very exchangeable without any unique, defining features. Just the thin, glossy, seductive veneer of a consumer product that’s anything but “built to last”.

Let’s get a nice juicy quote so I don’t end up re-writing the whole article through my own

(highly subjective) reading:

“To the extent that Young-Girlist formatting becomes generalized, competition will get tougher and the satisfaction tied to conformity will decrease. Got to take some qualitative leap; got to take on new and unexpected attributes; got to get away to some still-virgin space. Hollywood despair, a t.v. journal political consciousness, a vague spirituality of a neo-buddhist character, an engagement in whatever collective conscience cleaning enterprise gets the job done. And so, feature by feature, the eco-Young-Girl is hatched. The Young-Girls’ struggle to survive is then connected to the need to transcend the industrial Young-Girl, and the need to pass over to the eco Young-Girl. Contrary to its ancestor, the eco Young-Girl no longer displays a surge of some emancipation or other, but a security-crazed obsession with conservation. The Empire’s been fundamentally undermined and it’s got to defend itself from entropy. Having arrived at full hegemony, it can’t do anything but crumble any more. the eco-Young-Girl will therefore be responsible, “in solidarity,” ecological, maternal, reasonable, “natural,” respectful, more self-controlled than falsely liberated, in brief: biopolitical as hell. She’ll no longer be miming excess, but, on the contrary, moderation, in everything.” (Reins 2001, vi)

A lot is happening here. From what I gather, the emphasis is placed upon the tendency of commodified lifestyles to mutate and take on new forms. This is how Capitalism tends to survive and reproduce itself. It’s like a virus that needs to alter its own genetic make-up in order to bypass the defenses of the immune-system or withstand medical interventions like vaccination. The eco-Young-Girl is in this sense an *upgrade*. It’s Capitalism, or a Capitalist, engaging in self-criticism and adopting to what *seem* to be the demands of the public, the oppressed and the exploited, but in reality it only signals the emergence of a new market trend. I.e. “it pays to be anti-capitalist” or “it pays to engage in philanthropy”, to address climate issues and so forth. The Eco-Young-Girl is just another head of a Hydra. As other writers in the field have noted: Capitalism thrives on critique.

It’s becoming clearer now that this article is a prime example of “trash theory”, a genre of critique that I am particularly fond of. It refuses to lay down a well-rounded, polished text side-stepping the requirements of academic bureaucracy. Excellent! It’s a confused jumble of various critical observations, a cacophony of resistance, a heterogenous bricolage of textual delinquency brought together without any unifying principle. Moving forward into the meat of things: Chapter 1.

“The Young-Girl is crazy about the authentic because it’s a lie.” (Reins 2001, 1)

Since the Young-Girl is not a gendered construct, we now need to speak about *the Masculine Young-Girl*. “...we’re watching an ironic epilogue where the “masculine sex” is the victim and object of its own alienated desires”. Consumerism tends to over-invest the “female” body with sexual desire, in this sense “male” sexuality is anchored to and defined through an oversexualized image of “woman”. The only “proper” object of sexual desire. And yet, this object can never be desired, because desire becomes dissociated as the result of commodification.

“The Young-Girl wants to be either desired lovelessly or loved desirelessly.

| *In either case, her unhappiness is safe” (Reins 2001, 4)*

The Young-Girl is a one-dimensional character, something out of a Netflix show. Every action is a farce, a bad one at that. It is a lifestyle that emerges out of the most basic logic of economic colonialism. In Lacanian terms: There is never an irruption of the *Real*, but instead a constant proliferation of the failing Symbolic structures guaranteeing the jouissance of boredom and depression.

| *“The Young-Girl resembles her photo” (Reins 2001, 7)*

YG is entirely predictable. Her sexuality is no different from her work-schedule; an all-pervasive monotony is woven into everything she does with similarly calculated “adventures” of creative consumption. No real depth, no real erudition and no real transgression. Nothing beyond what can be monetized, either by her or by others.

The Masculine Young-Girl on the other hand is the Foucaultian subject of discipline par excellence. The well-trained body, perfectly nourished and productive. The bodily incarnation of slavery and pure suffering. For a more extensive treatment of the male body and power-relations that constitute the production of masculine subjects, you can take a look at my Master’s Thesis, where I apply Foucault’s analysis of power to boxing and combat sports:

Fighting Bodies: A Genealogy of the Ring.

| *“The Young-Girl brings all greatness down to the level of her ass” (Reins 2001, 9)*

The Young-Girl is the direct, diametrical reflection of the fighting body, or the Masculine Young-Girl. “She” is the site where numerous dispositifs and institutional power-structures proliferate in order to invest the body with the capacity to produce value. The Young-Girl is an institution that produces docile bodies, which in turn perpetuate the very same structures through a multiplicity of techniques of self-formation. The Young-Girl is an algorithm.

Bent on pseudo-Freudian introspection, she finds new ways to obsess over herself, speaking endlessly of her childhood and remaining eternally infantile. “Love” remains yet another strategy of securing life and stability, a domesticated variety of intimacy repressed and channeled through “Netflix and Chill”; the consumerist counterpart of the violent rupture and the threat to civil society that real love presents.

Devoid of all real seriousness everything is either “fun” or “weird”. The only claim to virginity that could be made is an ontological one, where no real experience ever enters her existential milieu. YG is an expert of sorts. Her attitude is professional, that of masterful superficiality and colorlessness. In a Deleuzian sense, the Young-Girl is precisely a code, the center of Capitalist desire, where everything is only an imitation of flows. The Young-Girl is a libidinal accountant and all intimacy is reduced to giving and taking, less and more, of investments and economic optimization.

The Young-Girl is therefore a lifestyle, a commodified lifestyle which renders individuals docile, productive and governable. Once again, this resonates with Foucault’s work on Biopolitics. In Chapter 2, the article makes the connection more explicit by analyzing the Young-Girl as a *technique of the self*.

| *“The Young-Girl desires the Young-Girl. The Young-Girl is the Young-Girl’s ideal” (Reins*

| 2001, 15)

The Young-Girl bears a particular relationship with herself. She is the narcissistic object of her own desire. The sexual act is only an escapist, auto-erotic act of self-consumption, the Other in this case is completely incorporated functioning as a tool, a relay between her and herself. But far from an expression of freedom or individuality, this relationship is strongly mediated by and through a series of commands and imperatives that emanate directly from social media, fashion magazines, advertisements and brain-dead TV shows. Not only is it the case that the Young-Girl is a militant deployment of economic governance, she also operates as an independent and self-governing perpetuating agent, the catalyst of this particular state of exception. The perfectionist without any real perfections of her own.

| *“The Young-Girl’s ”youth “ and”femininity,” her youthitude and feminitude in fact, are how appearance control deepens into body discipline” (Reins 2001, 17)*

To the extent that the YG fosters a particular style, a flat tautological personality and a concrete physical appearance, she is rendered entirely governable. The YG is *trained to be trainable*, a mobile force disciplining herself and others according to the dictates of the market.

The question concerning health looms like a mountain over the YG deployment. Foucault has identified a crucial link between population health and national wealth. The contemporary religious devotion to the care of one’s body is directly linked to the political agenda of state power. A healthy labor-force is a productive labor-force. In this sense, questions of sovereignty have increasingly become linked, if not entirely delegated to the realm of population management through demographic and statistical analyses. National health is therefore a matter of national security, much less than an expression of one’s “right to health” or a personal choice. This is becoming increasingly clear today, within the context of the Covid-19 crisis. The prevailing mode of governance manifests directly in the YG’s concern for herself.

| *“The Young-Girl conceives of her own existence as a management problem she needs to resolve” (Reins 2001, 19)*

YG is engaged in constant self-surveillance, a paranoiac fascination with herself. As the subject and the object of discipline, she must take great pains to align with the demands of the industry. The requirements for health, beauty and productivity. This is where “self-care” manifests most explicitly as free-market eugenics.

| *“Whatever extent her narcissism reaches to, the Young-Girl doesn’t love herself, what she loves is “her” image, that is, something that’s not just foreign and external, but which, in the full sense of the term, possesses her. And the Young-Girl lives beneath the tyranny of this ungrateful master” (Reins 2001, 22)*

| *In relation to her masculine YG counterpart, and this is where we return to the question why “Young-Girl” and not “Young-Boy” or “Macho-Man” etc., the Young-Girl remains in the position of relative power and autonomy. If state-apparatuses tend to invest the male body with violent capacities, they analogously invest the feminine with sexuality and thereby render the Masculine Young-Girl docile “by contagion” as his sexual fantasies become*

| *monopolized by the YG.*

| *“...the “masculine sex” is the victim and object of its own alienated desires” (Reins 2001, 2)*

Where industrial capitalism meant the alienation and appropriation of one's labor, post-industrial capitalism is defined through the annexation of one's desire, which takes place not through explicit commands, but implicit suggestions and covert incitements. Perpetuated by the disciplining, self-surveillance and mutual subjectivation of, and by individuals themselves. Capital is internalized by the subject, becoming part and parcel of their lifeworld. The YG is therefore much more and much less than a person. It's a security apparatus that mediates social relationships.

| *“The Young-Girl never gives herself, she only gives what she has, that is, the ensemble of qualities that are given to her. That's also why it's not possible to love the Young-Girl, but only to consume her” (Reins 2001, 23)*

Seduction becomes, in this case, a variety of labor. It serves an economic function of production and consumption. Under capitalism, “women” are dominated by their own sexuality, which exhibits more autonomy than the persons themselves. It turns into an institution that induces particular effects of power well beyond the intentions of those who identify with it. Through women, this power-structure extends its hold on men as well.

For YG, sexuality is at the furthest distance from intimacy, it is a relationship of absolute exteriority; an economic transaction. No one is more distant from the YG than those who get to fuck her. While her “best friends” end up being the sole beneficiaries of her affection. Dissociated desire. The alienation of desire manifests through YG's relationship with her body, which remains a foreign thing to her, like the product of alienated labor confronting the worker, her commodified body is now a fetishized artefact that belongs to no one and everyone at the same time.

| *“It is precisely by conferring upon her body—but more generally upon her whole being—the character of capital, that the Young-Girl is dispossessed” (Reins 2001, 27)*

YG is the levelling of all difference, the unification of all heterogeneous elements into a single, colorless image of false diversity. YG is that which fiat money uses to convert everything to its own abstract value. Canceling out all uniqueness and originality. All the specificity of use-value. Including love itself. She bears all the traits of a commodity as theorized by Marx.

| *“The Young-Girl is the commodity that at every moment demands to be consumed because with each passing moment she is getting closer to her expiration date” (Reins 2001, 30)*

| *“The Young-Girl sells her existence like it was a personal loan”(Reins 2001, 32)*

The YG is a decoy for real human relationships, being in truth a relationship between commodities. Producing human beings who are in fact only decoys of themselves, of what they are supposed to be, because what they “really” are is not something that sells very well. At heart YG is a contract, but one that lays claim to personal qualities, objectifying parts, both bodily and psychological traits, separating them from their owner and offering them for exchange. This way, even the most passionate love is in the end only *what you get for what*

you paid for. And its exchange value depends on how thoroughly one has internalized the logic of production, how far the contract has reached into one’s soul and how big of a chunk of one’s self has been abstracted and put up for sale.

To conclude: The Young-Girl is a diffusion of all real intensities, passions and unique experiences into a unified, scaled, graded and hierarchical system of consumer-goods. It is a spectacle of life and a spectacle of love. The YG is a deployment, a technique of the self that serves to produce docile obedient consumers who in turn reproduce the same lifestyle indefinitely. A managed, encoded, algorithmic security apparatus that serves to obliterate the self and social relations in order to channel them toward Biopolitical ends: The health of the population and the wealth of the state.

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